

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 IO-13 NIC-01

SR-02 ORM-03 RSR-01 /103 W

----- 126919

P R 190947Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6727

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

DEPT OF DEFENSE

CINCPAC

CINCPACREPPHIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 8256

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: MUSLIM DISSIDENCE IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

REF: (A) MANILA 7225

(B) MANILA 7355

BEGIN SUMMARY: SINCE GOP SPOKESMEN DECLARED A MONTH AGO THAT SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTHERN PHILS WELL UNDER CONTROL, MENTION OF MUSLIM INSURGENCY HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED FROM NATIONAL MEDIA. HOWEVER, FIGHTING CONTINUES AT MODERATE LEVEL, AND THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE IN PAST MONTH IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY GOVT AND REBEL FORCES. DESPITE DESIRE BY PHIL MILITARY TO MOUNT OFFENSIVE IN SULUS, PRESENT CONDITIONS IN COTABATO DO NOT SEEM TO

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WARRANT ANY WITHDRAWAL OF FORCES FOR USE ELSEWHERE.

EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE WITH REBELS HAVE BEEN SO FAR UNSUCCESSFUL. THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF REAL PROGRESS TOWARDS RESOLUTION OF VERY COMPLEX PROBLEMS INVOLVED, AND IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS ARE FOR CONTINUING CLASHES BETWEEN GOVT REGULAR AND IRREGULAR FORCES AND REBELS THROUGHOUT AFFECTED PROVINCES. CONTINUED HEAVY COMMITMENT OF GOVT FORCES IN SOUTH AND SERIOUS DRAIN ON PHIL RESOURCES, MILITARY AND FINANCIAL, CAN HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTH GOP AND US IN UPCOMING PERIOD. END SUMMARY.

1. OVERALL SECURITY SITUATION DURING PAST THREE WEEKS IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES HAS REMAINED ESSENTIALLY SAME AS THAT DESCRIBED IN LAST EMBASSY MESSAGE (REF A). REBEL ACTIVITIES CONTINUE IN SCATTERED AREAS, AND PHIL ARMED FORCES (AFP) HAVE NOT MADE ANY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN SUBDUING REBEL GROUPS DURING THIS PERIOD. REBEL ATTACKS AGAINST CIVILIAN ROAD TRAFFIC HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY COMMON. HEAVY FIGHTING HAS TAKEN PLACE IN LEBAK (COTABATO) AND BASILAN ISLAND, AND FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS IN GENERAL IS HIGH ENOUGH TO KEEP MUCH OF AFFECTED AREA TENSE.

2. REBELS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE ALMOST ALL OF SULU PROVINCE EXCEPT FOR CAPITAL OF JOLO AND SCATTERED MILITARY ENCAMPMENTS. SINCE GOVT POSTURE IN PROVINCE IS ESSENTIALLY DEFENSIVE, MOST INCIDENTS CONSIST OF MINOR SKIRMISHES INITIATED BY REBELS AGAINST STATIC GOVT POSITIONS. ONLY SIGNIFICANT FIGHTING IN SULU WAS EXPULSION OF GOVT BRIDGEHEAD ON PATA ISLAND, SOUTH OF JOLO ISLAND AND HOME OF FORMER SULU CONGRESSMAN INDANAN ANNI, DEFENDED BY ONE OF FEW MUSLIM CIVILIAN HOME DEFENSE FORCE (CHDF) UNITS. TWO THOUSAND EVACUEES INCLUDING LOCAL GOVT OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY FLED ISLAND TO PROVINCE CAPITAL.

3. AFP HAS INCREASED OFFENSIVE ACTIVITIES SINCE JULY 7 ON BASILAN ISLAND, TWO-THIRDS OF WHICH REMAINS UNDER REBEL CONTROL. THREE COMPANIES OF MARINES STATIONED THERE MADE AMPHIBIOUS LANDING AFTER TWO-HOUR NAVAL BOMBARDMENT IN LAMITAN AREA CONTROLLED BY REBELS.

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ALTHOUGH LANDING WAS UNOPPOSED, STIFF RESISTANCE WAS ENCOUNTERED INLAND, REQUIRING REINFORCEMENT OF MARINES BY TWO INFANTRY BATTALIONS. ELEVEN AFP TROOPERS REPORTED KILLED AND 24 WOUNDED WHILE AFP CLAIMED 146 REBELS KILLED, INCLUDING 68 IN ONE CLASH.

4. FIGHTING ALSO CONTINUES IN TWO ZAMBOANGA PROVINCES AND OUTER DISTRICTS OF ZAMBOANGA CITY, ABOUT 30 MILES

FROM MAIN URBAN AREA OF CITY, WHERE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON CIVILIAN TRAFFIC HAVE BECOME COMMON. MOST SERIOUS SUCH INCIDENT TOOK PLACE JUNE 26 IN ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR, WHEN TWO BUSES, REPORTEDLY CARRYING BOY SCOUTS, AMONG OTHERS, WERE AMBUSHED BY REBELS RESULTING IN 27 CIVILIANS KILLED AND 31 WOUNDED.

5. COTABATO (NORTH), MOST POPULOUS PROVINCE IN AFFECTED AREA, REMAINS PRINCIPAL CENTER OF CONFRONTATION. 27 OF 74 INCIDENT TOTAL BETWEEN JUNE 22 AND JULY 13 REPORTED BY AFP OFFICER IN BI-WEEKLY BRIEFINGS OF DEFENSE ATTACHE TOOK PLACE THERE. HEAVIEST FIGHTING HAS BEEN IN MUNICIPALITY OF LEBAK IN SOUTHWESTERN SECTION OF PROVINCE WHERE LARGE REBEL FORCE HAS RESISTED ATTEMPTS OVER PAST MONTH BY FIVE INFANTRY BATTALIONS REINFORCED BY CHDF FORCES TO DISLODGE IT FROM FORESTED REDOUBT NEAR COAST. AIR STRIKES HAVE BEEN FREQUENT AND CASUALTIES HEAVY ON BOTH SIDES. ONE RELIABLE REPORT OF 67 CHDF MEMBERS KILLED IN REBEL ATTACK ON JUNE 27 WAS NOT REPORTED BY AFP BRIEFER. IN CENTRAL PART OF PROVINCE, FORCE OF 500 REBELS ATTACKED THREE BARRIOS IN SULTAN SA BARAONGIS MUNICIPALITY ON JUNE 29, BURNING ONE BARRIO BEFORE WITHDRAWING INTO LINGUASAN MARSH. ELSEWHERE IN PROVINCE, REBEL TACTICS SEEM PREDOMINANTLY OF GUERRILLA NATURE WITH ATTACKS ON SMALL AFP DETACHMENTS AND HARRASSMENT OF CIVILIAN PASSENGER AND COMMERCIAL VEHICLES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANILA 8256

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

6. WHILE CONFLICT CONTINUES IN COTABATO, ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT ABATED, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT AFP HAS FOR SOME TIME RE-ESTABLISHED A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF CONTROL OVER MOST POPULATED AREAS. THIS HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY BUILD-UP OF AFP FORCES TO PRESENT LEVEL OF 10 BATTALIONS (PLUS ONE MORE EN ROUTE) AND BY ARMING APPROXIMATELY TEN THOUSAND CIVILIANS, MOST OF WHOM ARE CHRISTIAN AND INCLUDE FANATICALLY ANTI-MUSLIM ILAGA GROUPS. ACCORDING TO ONE AMERICAN OBSERVER WHO RECENTLY TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY THROUGH COTABATO, GOVT CONTROL HAS BEEN RESTORED IN MOST MUNICIPALITIES. MOST CHRISTIAN EVACUEES HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES, ALTHOUGH MANY MUSLIMS HAVE NOT YET DONE SO. CONTINUING RAINS AFTER LONG DROUGHT HAVE PERMITTED MUCH OF RICE AND CORN CROPS TO BE PLANTED. WHILE NO LONGER IN  
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CONTROL OF POPULATION CENTERS, MUSLIM REBELS ARE STILL PRESENT IN STRENGTH IN SEVERAL AREAS, MOST NOTABLY IN PARANG, NEAR IV PHIL CONSTABULARY ZONE HEADQUARTERS, LINGUASAN MARSH AREA IN CENTRAL PART OF PROVINCE AND, OF COURSE, LEBAK ON COAST. ELSEWHERE, SMALLER GROUPS OF REBELS STILL HAVE ABILITY TO HARRASS GOVT FORCES AND CIVILIAN TRAFFIC.

7. COMMENT: WHILE ARMING OF CIVILIANS BY GOVT HAS BEEN KEY TO IMPROVING SECURITY SITUATION IN COTABATO, IT HAS DISTINCT DISADVANTAGE OF CONTRIBUTING TO POLARIZATION OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES, WHICH IS NOW GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE. VARIOUS EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE SURRENDER OF REBELS HAVE BEEN NOTABLY UNSUCCESSFUL, AND PROSPECTS ARE THAT VIOLENCE WILL CONTINUE, IMPEDING TASKS OF REHABILITATION AND RECONCILIATION. IN SOME CONTRAST WITH GOP CLAIMS TO DOMESTIC AUDIENCE THAT SITUATION IN SOUTH WAS IN HAND, DEFSEC PONCE ENRILE, IN INTERVIEW WITH NYT CORRESPONDENT DURDIN, ESTIMATED THAT AFP WOULD REQUIRE ANOTHER SIX MONTHS TO RESTORE PEACE AND ORDER IN MUSLIM AREAS. THUS, CONTINUED HEAVY COMMITMENT IN SOUTH OF

AFP FORCES (NOW INCLUDING 17 OF 25 COMBAT READY ARMY  
BATTALIONS) AND SERIOUS DRAIN ON GOP RESOURCES CAN BE  
EXPECTED FOR NEXT MONTHS. BESIDES FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS  
INHERENT IN THIS SITUATION FOR GOP, PRESSURE UPON US  
FOR INCREASED MAP SUPPLIES SEEMS LIKELY AND REQUEST FOR  
EXPEDITED DELIVERY OF PROGRAMMED AMMUNITION ALREADY RECEIVED.  
HAMILTON

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## Message Attributes

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